

UNCLAS ZAGREB 001841

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE - KABUMOTO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: HDZ PICKS KOSOR, "DIGNIFIED" CAMPAIGN AHEAD

REF: A. ZAGREB 01601

[B.](#) ZAGREB 01571

[¶](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) announced on 17 October its nomination of Jadranka Kosor, Deputy PM and Minister of Family, Generational Solidarity and Veterans' Affairs (bio follows) as candidate for the presidential elections (ref A) currently planned for Tuesday, December 21. This choice reflects the party's desire to select a safe candidate -- i.e. one who can lose gracefully to the overwhelmingly popular incumbent President Stjepan Mesic and minimize the damage this loss inflicts on the HDZ heading into local elections expected in May 2005 (ref B).

[¶](#)2. (U) By law, the government must schedule elections on non-working days, so discussion of a midweek vote has sparked complaints from the business community about lost revenue from another shutdown in late December. Speaker of Parliament Vladimir Seks has said the government may avoid the workday issue and call the election for Sunday, January 2, 2005. PM Sanader is now floating a proposal for a constitutional amendment allowing presidential elections on the same Sunday every five years, rather than the current window between 30 and 60 days prior to the end of the incumbent's mandate. The opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) has expressed opposition to reopening a constitutional debate. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

LOW EXPECTATIONS, HIGH RHETORIC

[¶](#)3. (SBU) While the HDZ has promised to do all it can to ensure Kosor's victory, the party will likely avoid harsh criticism of the president, given his reputation as Croatia's most popular politician. The HDZ would prefer to maintain its good relations with Mesic and just get the election over with (December 21 is the earliest electoral date under the Constitution, putting the greatest possible amount of time between this and the May local elections); so Kosor's campaign will likely remain in her words "dignified" and "peaceful."

[¶](#)4. (U) Analysts believe Kosor can count on core HDZ voters (about 30% in the last elections), but will lose centrist voters to Mesic, who has the support of at least seven opposition parties, and more extreme right wing voters to Slaven Letica of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP). Other candidates include the far right Croatian Block's president Ivic Pasalic, a close associate of former president Franjo Tudjman, and Miroslav "Ciro" Blazevic, whose political reputation rests largely on his coaching of the Croatian national soccer team to a third place World Cup finish in [¶](#)1998. This opposition may not be sufficient to push the election to a second round (held two weeks after the first round), as Mesic's current poll numbers are well over the required 50 percent.

[¶](#)5. (U) Kosor has already made her first misstep of the campaign: when she claimed she already had the support of a Croatian network of 40 women's NGOs, NGO leaders publicly denied the assertion, reporting they are still waiting to hear Kosor's positions on key issues. She is the second woman to run for president in Croatia's history.

BIOGRAPHY: WARTIME RADIO BROADCASTS BUILT PUBLIC FOLLOWING

[¶](#)6. (U) Kosor was born on July 1, 1953, in the Slavonian town of Pakrac. She began her professional career as a journalist in 1972, working for the daily newspaper Vecernji List and Radio Zagreb (now Croatian Radio). During the 1991-95 war, she hosted radio shows for refugees and other displaced persons, earning her name recognition and public popularity. In 1995 she became one of the HDZ's vice presidents, was elected to parliament, and became deputy speaker. In 2002, she became deputy president of the HDZ, making her officially the number two in the party. She was elected to a third term in parliament in 2003 but gave up her seat to take her current cabinet position. In recent years, she has focused her political energies on issues related to motherhood and

war veterans. Kosor holds a law degree from the Law Faculty in Zagreb. She has one son and lives in Zagreb. She speaks some English and understands German.
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